



# Expanding design skills for language teachers: a corpus-based web application for ‘language for work’ content creation in Italian L2

Elena Michellini<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract.** Many adult migrants lacking L2 linguistic autonomy cannot afford the time to master host countries’ languages before providing for their basic needs. Thus, second language training that focuses on occupational integration is at times more urgent than a more generally social one, as the European ‘language for work’ approach suggests. Given the shortage of both support sector experts in Italian L2 classes and an appropriate variety of teaching materials for beginners, this paper introduces a PhD work-in-progress project proposing an IT procedure which enables language teachers to collaboratively design specialised multimedia content for beginners, thus enhancing work-related second language development. The article discusses the results of some preliminary surveys and argues the importance of the use of technology when expanding teachers’ design skills.

**Keywords:** ‘language for work’, wikis, collaborative knowledge creation, teacher training, specialised corpora.

## 1. A ‘language for work’

European policies require migrants to demonstrate their proficiency in host country languages before they may participate in all aspects of society. Yet many adult migrants lacking L2 linguistic autonomy cannot take the time to master them before providing for their basic needs. Obstacles to professional integration can have a major impact both on the status of the individual, and on the quality of the socio-economic tissue of the host community.

---

1. Università degli Studi di Macerata, Macerata, Italy; e.michellini@unime.it; <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0905-2339>

**How to cite this article:** Michellini, E. (2022). Expanding design skills for language teachers: a corpus-based web application for ‘language for work’ content creation in Italian L2. In B. Arnbjörnsdóttir, B. Bédi, L. Bradley, K. Friðriksdóttir, H. Garðarsdóttir, S. Thouésny, & M. J. Whelpton (Eds), *Intelligent CALL, granular systems, and learner data: short papers from EUROCALL 2022* (pp. 266-272). Research-publishing.net. <https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2022.61.1469>

The ‘language for work’ approach<sup>2</sup> promoted by the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (Beacco, Krumm, Little, & Thalgott, 2017; Braddell & Grünhage-Monetti, 2018), proposes to develop language skills and professional competence at the same time. This methodology has had no adequate response in Italy, even if the country is dealing with stable migratory flows (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS, 2019). At the institutional level, the country lacks specific courses for migrants wishing to enter the workforce, an appropriate variety of teaching materials for beginners, and experts supporting language teachers (Michelini, 2020).

Therefore, language teachers struggle to find specific teaching aids. In the focus group and surveys conducted for the AMIF<sup>3</sup> project *La lingua italiana per l'integrazione e per il lavoro*, all Italian L2 teachers reported difficulty in finding both beginner-specific teaching materials and specialised content which is reliable and responds to work-related needs (Cognigni, Michelini, & Vitrone, 2022, pp. 80-93).

With the shortage of both sector experts and an appropriate variety of teaching materials for beginners, the objective of this project is to enable language teachers to create work-related teaching content. Awaiting reorganisation from the Italian government training scheme aimed at adult migrants, the idea is to enable teachers to undertake this mode in their educational institutions, hence improving beginners’ likelihood of access to work.

## 2. Prototype and procedure

To identify the most strategic economic sector in Italy, statistical research was conducted, the chosen realm being catering (Michelini, 2020). The focus was placed on an A2 CEFR<sup>4</sup> level audience, a wide group who relies on a limited number of sector-specific training aids (Cognigni et al., 2022, pp. 80-93). Hence, a web application and an IT procedure were introduced to enable language teachers to collaboratively design specialised multimedia teaching content, applicable as *the most reliable* in relation to the work context.

---

2. European experiences on LanguageforWork at <https://languageforwork.ecml.at/>

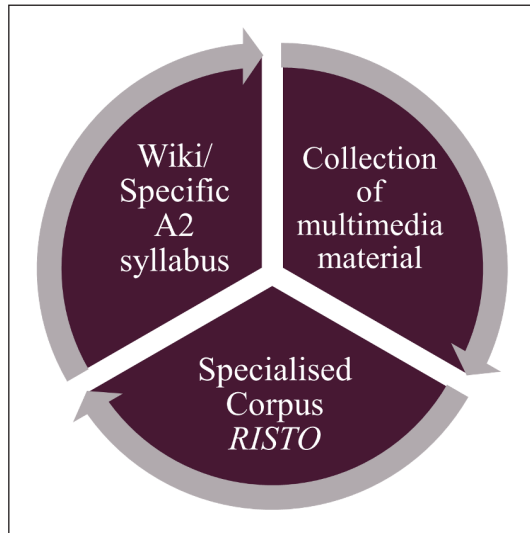
3. Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund.

4. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

---

The IT prototype for content creation consists of different IT environments (Figure 1), such as a web application, a wiki<sup>5</sup> aimed for collaborative implementation, a storage space for multimedia teaching items, and potential future training. Furthermore, a sector-specific A2 level syllabus as training model and wiki's interface is needed, as well as a tailor-made specialised corpus – *RISTO* – and a collection of specialised multimedia material.

Figure 1. IT prototype structure



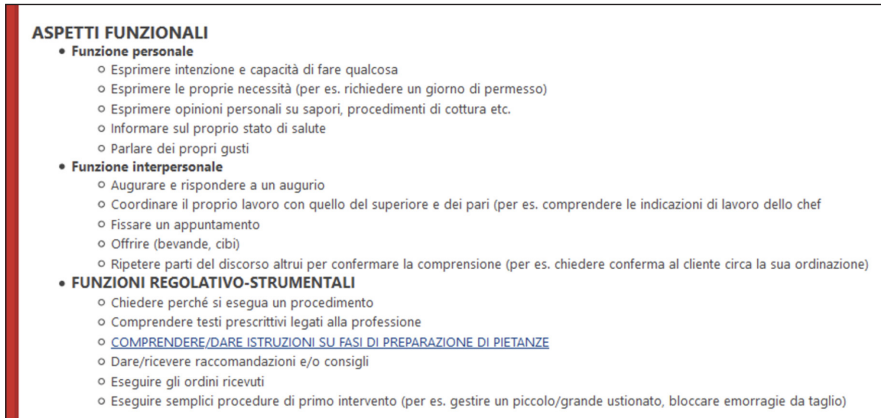
The wiki application was created in PBWorks<sup>6</sup>. Its interface shows the syllabus with its typical catering communicative acts – the necessary learning objectives (Figure 2). It enables teachers to implement entries of the virtual syllabus picking elements to be processed from a multimedia collection – which stores previously selected multimedia items – or from outside of it, thus enriching the collection and the corpus with new context-related material. Thanks to teachers' skills, content can be refined through the specialised corpus, then adapted to meet learners' language levels, and finally, redeposited within the digital syllabus-wiki entry, ready to deepen a precise learning objective.

---

5. A wiki is a collaborative website which allows authors to edit and store information in a shared environment using a browser interface (Cantoni & Tardini, 2008, p. 31).

6. PBworks. (<https://www.pbworks.com/>).

Figure 2. Wiki's interface<sup>7</sup>



Teachers can store various multimedia resources in each syllabus-wiki entry (Figure 3). These could be portions of written language, images, audio, files in various formats, external links, and videos (Figure 4), which are particularly valuable as a context for simulation, preparatory to real practice.

Figure 3. Wiki's resources<sup>8</sup>



7. Excerpt of the wiki's interface showing virtual training objectives to be implemented.

8. Excerpt of multimedia resources provided in each wiki entry.

Figure 4. Videos



Multimedia teaching items are designed to meet basic training needs, supplementing traditional paper-based teaching aids. Moreover, a complete training course using only the application is imaginable as a stand-alone digital textbook. In this regard, students report a positive reception to the use of wikis for L2 learning and their participation in courses significantly increases (Sánchez-Gómez, Pinto-Llorente & García-Peñalvo, 2017).

## 2.1. *RISTO* corpus

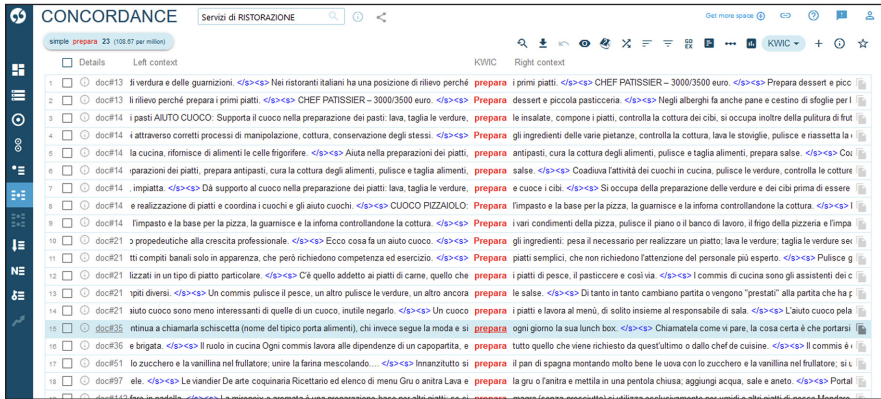
Tailor-made in Sketch Engine<sup>9</sup>, the specialised corpus *RISTO* represents the language of catering. BootCat<sup>10</sup> was added for the semi-automatic retrieval of texts from the web. Currently, it contains about 350 texts and is continually expanding. Its focus is on researchers of specialised languages and their examination of communicative productions “in their social use” (Pietrandrea, 2012, p. 272). In addition, teachers can benefit from corpus resources to improve pedagogical practice, and when designing data-intensive teaching activities (Römer, 2011).

*RISTO* compensates for teachers’ limited specialised knowledge, enabling both searches and checking of specialised linguistic models, and helps teachers create portions of written language useful for various educational purposes. In the absence of a sector expert, teachers are brought closer to information *accuracy* and trustworthy introductory professional information is provided (Figure 5).

---

9. Sketch Engine. (<https://www.sketchengine.eu/>).

10. BootCat. (<https://bootcat.dipintra.it/>).

Figure 5. Concordance in *RISTO*<sup>11</sup>

## 2.2. Technology, collaboration, and teacher's skills

A preliminary survey was carried out through close and open-ended questions in Google Forms during a teacher ‘language for work’ training course in digital environment within the AMIF project. A sample of 44 respondents of teachers and teachers in training provided the analysed data. Regarding the corpus, 88.6% of beginner-user respondents<sup>12</sup> would use it again ‘to compensate for limited domain knowledge’ or simply ‘to find good examples of specialised language’. Asked about their main needs in creating teaching materials, the majority emphasised ‘finding textual content’, immediately followed by ‘finding audio-visual content’.

In this collaborative project – taking its cue from *constructivism* (Jonassen, 1994), numerous teachers can contribute, intervening in the creation phase, relying on the expertise of other members, to the benefit of time and quality of the final product. In this regard, 95.5% of the sample rated the co-construction of ‘language for work’ teaching activities in the digital environment ‘very positively’. Finally, 97.7% declared their interest in repeating a course focused on the collaborative creation of multimedia teaching materials, thus attesting to a growing interest in the use of technology in design and classroom training.

11. Excerpt of a concordance in *RISTO* corpus.

12. The sample received training and tried the tool during the course.

### 3. Conclusions

In this project, technology has been adopted to exploit the advantages of multimedia use in future language training. As preliminary data suggest, specialised teaching content design can happen in an IT collaborative environment, utilising the teaching teams' competence and the impact of technology on educational design. With the study still ongoing, definitive results are yet to be reached and final surveys need to be conducted. However, preliminary results demonstrate the strength of the content creation method and a first digital prototype for adult migrant's work-focused training has been created. Moreover, surveys confirm that IT brings significant advantages in strengthening teachers' design skills, as well as facilitating the sharing of common knowledge and expertise. Finally, this model can easily be replicated for other professions and language levels.

### References

- Beacco, J. C., Krumm, H. J., Little, D., & Thalgot, P. (2017). *The linguistic integration of adult migrants*. Council of Europe. De Gruyter. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110477498>
- Braddell, A., & Grünhage-Monetti, M. (2018). (Eds). *Lingua e lavoro* (vol. 40). Loescher.
- Cantoni, L., & Tardini, S. (2008). Communicating in the information society: new tools for new practices. In P. C. Rivoltella (Ed.), *Digital literacy: Tools and methodologies for information society* (pp. 26-44). IGI Global.
- Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS. (2019). *Dossier statistico Immigrazione 2019*. Centro Studi Confronti.
- Cognigni, E., Michellini, E., & Vitrone, F. (2022). ItaLavoro: un sillabo di italiano L2 per l'inserimento socioprofessionale dei migranti nei settori della ristorazione e della cura alla persona. In F. Caon & E. Cognigni (Eds), *L'italiano L2 per l'inclusione e per il lavoro. Teorie e pratiche didattiche in contesto migratorio* (pp. 80-93). ODG Edizioni.
- Jonassen, D. H. (1994). Thinking technology. Towards a constructivist design model. *Educational Technology*, 34(4), 34-37.
- Michellini, E. (2020). *Italiano L2 per l'inserimento socio-professionale di migranti adulti vulnerabili*. Unpublished master's thesis. Università di Macerata.
- Pietrandrea, P. (2012). L'approccio socio-semiotico alle lingue dei segni. In A. M. Thornton, M. Voghera & T. De Mauro (Eds), *Per Tullio De Mauro: studi offerti dalle allieve in occasione del suo 80° compleanno* (pp. 265-285). Aracne.
- Römer, U. (2011). Corpus research applications in second language teaching. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 205-225. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190511000055>
- Sánchez-Gómez, M., Pinto-Llorente, A. M., & García-Peñalvo, F. J. (2017). The impact of wikis and discussion boards on learning English as a second language. A mixed methods research. *Digital Education Review*, 32, 35-59.

Published by Research-publishing.net, a not-for-profit association  
Contact: [info@research-publishing.net](mailto:info@research-publishing.net)

© 2022 by Editors (collective work)  
© 2022 by Authors (individual work)

**Intelligent CALL, granular systems and learner data: short papers from EUROCALL 2022**  
Edited by Birna Arnbjörnsdóttir, Branislav Bédi, Linda Bradley, Kolbrún Friðriksdóttir, Hólmfríður Garðarsdóttir, Sylvie Thoučsny, and Matthew James Whelpton

**Publication date:** 2022/12/12

**Rights:** the whole volume is published under the Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives International (CC BY-NC-ND) licence; **individual articles may have a different licence.** Under the CC BY-NC-ND licence, the volume is freely available online (<https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2022.61.9782383720157>) for anybody to read, download, copy, and redistribute provided that the author(s), editorial team, and publisher are properly cited. Commercial use and derivative works are, however, not permitted.

**Disclaimer:** Research-publishing.net does not take any responsibility for the content of the pages written by the authors of this book. The authors have recognised that the work described was not published before, or that it was not under consideration for publication elsewhere. While the information in this book is believed to be true and accurate on the date of its going to press, neither the editorial team nor the publisher can accept any legal responsibility for any errors or omissions. The publisher makes no warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein. While Research-publishing.net is committed to publishing works of integrity, the words are the authors' alone.

**Trademark notice:** product or corporate names may be trademarks or registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and explanation without intent to infringe.

**Copyrighted material:** every effort has been made by the editorial team to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyrighted material in this book. In the event of errors or omissions, please notify the publisher of any corrections that will need to be incorporated in future editions of this book.

Typeset by Research-publishing.net  
Cover photo by © 2022 Kristinn Ingvarsson (photo is taken inside Veröld – House of Vigdís)  
Cover layout by © 2022 Raphaël Savina ([raphael@savina.net](mailto:raphael@savina.net))

ISBN13: 978-2-38372-015-7 (PDF, colour)

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.  
A cataloguing record for this book is available from the British Library.

**Legal deposit, France:** Bibliothèque Nationale de France - Dépôt légal: décembre 2022.